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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

25 February 1988

LEBANON: AMAL AND THE HIGGINS KIDNAPPING

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Summary

Amal's efforts in Southern Lebanon to locate LTC Higgins have been earnest, despite friction between pro-Iranian members and loyalists of local Amal strongman Daud Daud. If Higgins is still in the south, as we suspect he is, Amal probably has the best chance of any group to locate him. Should Higgins be moved out of southern Lebanon, we believe there is virtually no chance that Amal will obtain useful information on his whereabouts. Higgins' continuing captivity would represent a damaging blow to the prestige of Amal and Daud Daud and would bolster perceptions that Hizballah was eclipsing Amal.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries may be directed to [redacted]

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Since LTC Higgins' abduction on 17 February, numerous reliable reports have indicated that the Shia militia Amal has mounted an effort to find him. Amal is embarrassed that its rival, Hizballah (or at least elements of it), could kidnap a UN official in an area nominally under Amal's control.

Amal has seriously sought to find Higgins. More than 100 Hizballah members have been detained by Amal, Hizballah offices have been searched, and Amal and Hizballah members have exchanged gunfire.

Amal's Standing in the South

We believe Amal has significant problems in the south which constrain its ability to find Higgins and combat Hizballah's influence:

— Hizballah's campaign of attacks against the Israelis and pro-Israeli militias in southern Lebanon has eroded Amal's popular support,

Amal's reluctance to join in these attacks casts Amal in the role of Israel's friend in southern Lebanon.

— Hizballah has infiltrated Amal in an effort to compromise Amal's leadership,

— Hizballah and Iran provide substantial financial aid and social welfare programs to the southern Shia, making it difficult for the generally pragmatic southerners to side with Amal.

— Amal's chronic financial problems have made it unable to compete effectively with Hizballah.

— Nabih Barri's close identification with Syria lessens Amal's prestige in the south; Hizballah's identification with the martyred southern Shia cleric Shaykh Ragheb Harb, Ayatollah Fadlallah, other southerner clerics, and Ayatollah

Khomeini boosts the radical fundamentalists' prestige.

Despite these problems, we judge that Amal retains substantial strength in southern Lebanon.

— Amal in the south has inherited the legitimacy of the movements' founder, Imam Musa Sadr, and can claim to be following a policy he espoused.

— Amal is identified more there with Daud Daud than with Nabih Barri. Daud has had some success in undercutting Hizballah's influence, orchestrating a massive Amal demonstration in Tyre in Fall 1986 and publicly destroying some 8,000 copies of Hizballah's newspaper, *Al-Ahd*, in October 1987.

— Amal's support of the UN presence and its condemnation of Hizballah attacks against UNIFIL has the backing of most southern Shia. Hizballah terminated its attacks against UNIFIL in summer 1986 and belatedly mobilized a public relations campaign in response to Amal's charges of Hizballah responsibility.

— Amal's strength in southern Lebanon—in terms of committed supporters—probably still exceeds Hizballah's.

— Amal can turn to Damascus for substantial military and political assistance.

Political Constraints to Cooperation with The United States

We believe that political concerns limit Amal's ability to cooperate openly with a US effort to rescue Higgins.

— Working with US (or worse, Israeli) forces would open Amal to criticism that it was working with the main enemy of Lebanon's Shias. Iran and Hizballah have already accused Amal of betraying Islam for the sake of "a US spy and Zionism."

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b1/b3 [REDACTED] pressure on the Israeli security zone in southern Lebanon, and probably not produce a clear winner. Nonetheless, the situation is volatile and isolated Amal-Hizballah clashes already have taken place. A major clash almost certainly would endanger Higgins' life or increase pressure on his captors to move him out of the south. [REDACTED] b3

- The arrest and possible trial in the United States of the low level Amal official Fawaz Yunis on terrorist charges makes many Amal members hostile to working with the United States on the Higgins kidnapping.

- Amal officials may believe their prestige would be damaged if they did not demonstrate their clout by trying to rescue Higgins themselves. [REDACTED] b3

If Higgins is not released soon, his kidnapping will increasingly represent a Hizballah political victory over Amal. The initial wave of support for Amal's efforts to find Higgins seems to have crested and the Hizballah sponsored clerical criticism of rescue efforts is undercutting Amal's prestige. [REDACTED] b3

Outlook

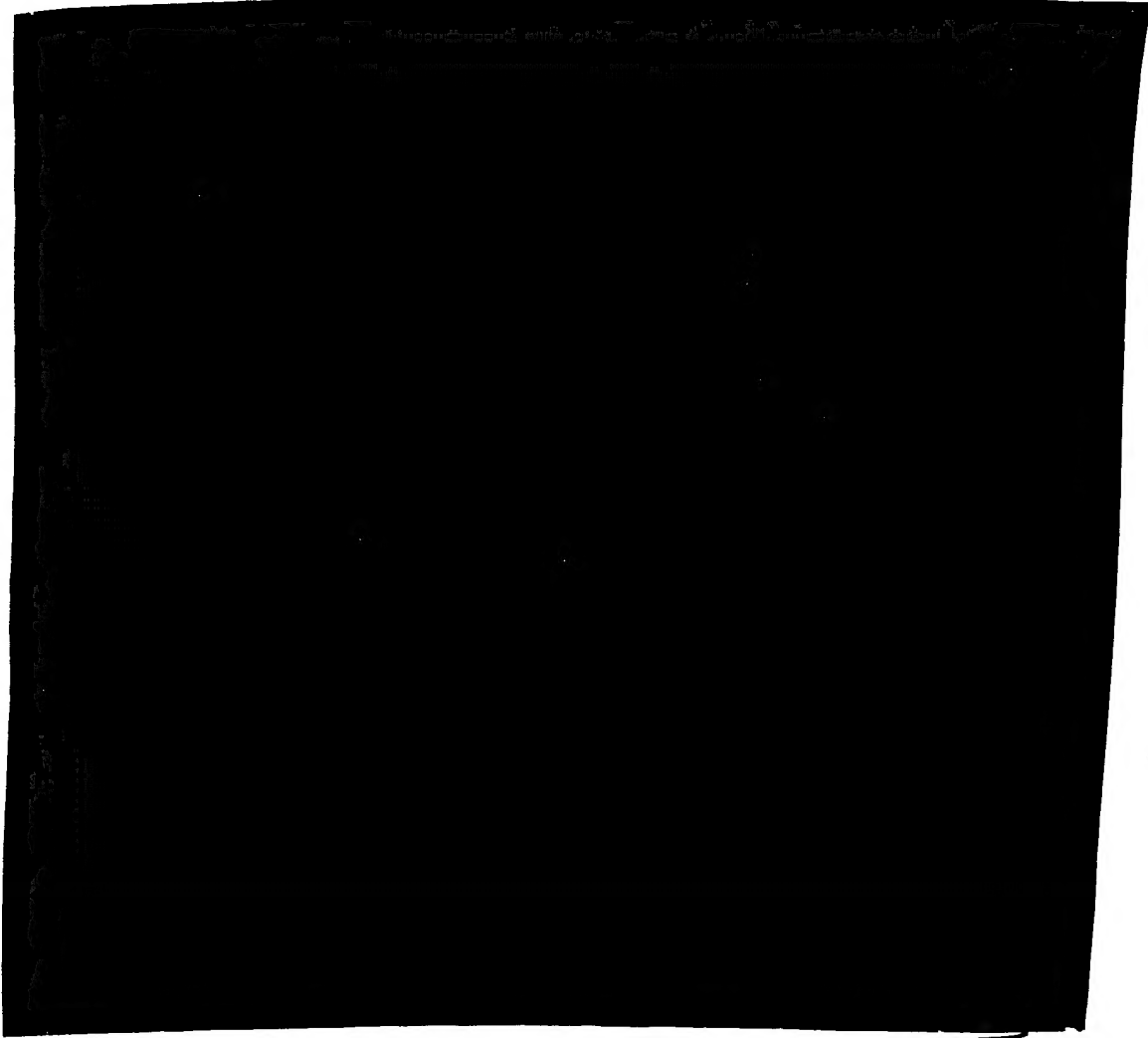
Amal probably is not strong enough to rescue Higgins independently, but it may be able to locate him if he remains in southern Lebanon. The more time that Hizballah has to orchestrate a campaign against Amal, however, the more likely Amal searches will become perfunctory. [REDACTED] b3

If Higgins is moved out of southern Lebanon, we believe that the chances that Amal will rescue him or obtain useful information on his location become almost nil. We believe that once he is taken to the Bekaa Valley or West Beirut, pressure from Iran to have access to Higgins would increase significantly, and Iranian policy concerns would influence Hizballah decisionmaking about how long and with what degree of security to hold Higgins. Iran doubtless believes that useful intelligence could be extracted from Higgins during a protracted interrogation. [REDACTED] b3

There is a risk that Amal-Hizballah tension will grow and cause a major showdown. Both groups--and their Syrian and Iranian patrons--want to avoid a costly confrontation that would polarize the Shia community, endanger Syrian-Iranian ties, erode

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